

Message Text

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ACTION AID-59

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FM AMEMBASSY NIAMEY

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INFO AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN

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DEPARTMENT PASS PEACE CORPS

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT NG

SUBJECT: BBC FILM ON NIGER -- AFDROUGHT

1. BRUCE PARSONS, CANADIAN NATIONAL, AND TV FILM FREE-LANCER, HAS JUST RETURNED FROM TWO MONTHS VENTURE INTO INTERIOR OF NIGER. ALONG WITH THREE-MAN TV CREW, PARSONS LIVED OFF LAND DURING THIS PERIOD, OUT OF TOUCH WITH NIAMEY AND HOME OFFICE FOR SEVERAL WEEKS AT A TIME. TEAM SURVIVED ON WHATEVER AVAILABLE LOCALLY, WHICH USUALLY NOT MUCH, UNLESS ONE FANCIES LOCAL GRUEL AND CAMELS MILK. PARSONS STRUCK US AS UNUSUALLY BALANCED, REALISTIC AND PERCEPTIVE OBSERVER OF LOCAL SCENE AND SOME OF HIS OBSERVATIONS SEEM WORTH RECORDING AS FOLLOWS:

A. TEAM RECEIVED PERMISSION TO FILM DROUGHT SITUATION FROM DIORI GOVERNMENT AND FORTUNATELY LEFT NIAMEY FOR BUSH DAY BEFORE COUP. TEAM WAS IN DOGONDOUTCHI AREA WHEN COUP OCCURRED AND ENCOUNTERED NO PROBLEMS FROM LOCAL OFFICIALS WHO UNWISELY

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PREDICTED THAT MILITARY DIDN'T HAVE CHANCE AND DIORI WAS CERTAIN

TO PREVAIL. AT PARSONS' INSISTENCE, TEAM'S CREDENTIALS TO TRAVEL IN INTERIOR RECONFIRMED BY CABLE FROM NIAMEY SEVERAL DAYS AFTER NEW GOVERNMENT TOOK OVER.

B. PARSONS' ASSIGNMENT WAS TO FILM DROUGHT SITUATION, BUT AFTER STUDYING CONDITIONS IN AREA BETWEEN DAKORO AND AGADEZ, HE CONCLUDED FAMINE HAD BEEN AVERTED AND HE DECIDED ON DOCUMENTARY ON EFFECTS OF DROUGHT ON SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF A VILLAGE. PLACE SELECTED WAS GADABEDJI, NORTHEAST OF DAKORO, WHICH FEATURED REFUGEE CAMP TO TOUARGES LED BY SECOND-RANKING TOUAREG CHIEF IN NIGER.

C. LOCAL OFFICIALS COOPERATED FULLY, INCLUDING TOUAREG ARMY REP WHO ASSIGNED TO FILM CREW AS ESCORT AND INTERPRETER. LATTER HELPFUL UNTIL HE LOST FACE ONE DAY DURING EXCHANGE WITH TOUAREG CHIEF WHICH REVEALED THAT CHIEF COULD READ FRENCH WHILE ARMY ESCORT ILLITERATE. HIS VALUE TO TEAM AMONG TOUAREGS DIMINISHED RAPIDLY THEREAFTER.

C. ONE OF DILEMMAS PARSONS SAID HE FACED IN FILMING WAS HOW TO PUT ACROSS BELIEVABLE PICTURE OF TOUAREG SOCIETY TO BRITISH AUDIENCE WHICH HAD ROMANTIC VIEW OF TOUAREGS AS NOBLE SAVAGES AND GENERALLY UNAWARE THAT THIS SOCIETY BASED ON SLAVERY WHICH BRITISH ABHOR. ONE EXAMPLE OF THIS SITUATION WAS DECISION OF TOUAREG CHIEF TO SLAUGHTER TWELVE SHEEP TO CELEBRATE BAPTISM OF 20TH CHILD WHILE TOUAREGS IN CAMP WERE AT THAT TIME GETTING ENOUGH FOOD FOR ONE MEAL EVERY THREE DAYS. APPARENTLY TOUAREGS FOUND NOTHING STRANGE OR WRONG ABOUT THIS SITUATION.

D. PARSONS VISITED PEACE CORPS GARDEN PROJECT SOUTH OF MARADI AT MADAROUNFA, WHICH COOPERATIVE VENTURE AND INVOLVES INSTRUCTION IN GROWING VEGETABLES, ETC. AND CONSTRUCTION OF WELL. HE ALSO VISITED "LADY BUG" PROJECT NEAR AGADEZ UNDER CWS MANAGEMENT WHICH INVOLVES INTRODUCTION OF LADY BUGS (FROM IRAN) INTO AREA TO EAT SCALE ON DATE PALMS. HE FILMED GARDEN PROJECT BUT DECIDED AGAINST LADY BUG PROJECT, WHICH WAS FASCINATING BUT WHICH HE FELT WAS DIVERSION FROM MAIN THEME OF DOCUMENTARY.

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E. PARSONS DESCRIBED FOOD SITUATION AS GENERALLY UNDER CONTROL. HE SAID FAMINE CATASTROPHE HAD BEEN AVOIDED, BUT HE FELT ANOTHER CATASTROPHE MIGHT BE IN MAKING IF GON'S CURRENT PLANS TO RETURN REFUGEES TO LAND DOES NOT WORK BECAUSE OF ANOTHER ROUND OF RAIN AND CROP FAILURE.

F. DISTRIBUTION OF GOOD GRAINS TO GADABEDJI WAS UNEVEN.

AT ONE TIME, NO FOOD REACHED VILLAGE FOR TWENTY DAYS AND TOUAREGS EXCEPT FOR CHIEF AND HIS FAMILY REDUCED TO EATING LEAVES. MOST OF TIME, FOOD NEEDS AT MINIMUM NUTRITIONAL LEVEL WERE MET. PARSONS NOTED THAT AFTER COUP AND ARRIVAL OF NEW SET OF LOCAL OFFICIALS, PRICE OF FOOD GRAINS DROPPED 50 PERCENT AND DISTRIBUTION WAS HANDLED FAR MORE HONESTLY AND EFFICIENTLY.

G. CONTRARY TO CONVENTIONAL WISDOM, TOUAREGS WILL ENGAGE IN MANUAL LABOR. PARSONS OBSERVED GROUP OF TOUAREGS NORTH OF AGADEZ WORKING ON WATER CACHEMENT PROJECT UNDER DIRECTION OF FRENCH WHITE FATHERS.

H. PARSONS FACED USUAL PROBLEMS OF DEALING WITH BBC HOME OFFICE WHICH LIVED IN DIFFERENT WORLD. HE SAID HE WAS PEPPERED WITH MESSAGES REQUESTING SUCH ITEMS AS SHOTS OF VULTURES AT WORK ON CORPSES. ASIDE FROM FACT THESE MESSAGES DID NOT ENDEAR PARSONS TO NIGER OFFICIALDOM WHICH READ THEM, PARSONS SAID THERE WERE NO SUCH SCENES TO BE OBSERVED.

2. FOR LONDON: PARSONS' DOCUMENTARY IS BEING PREPARED FOR BBC PROGRAM "THE WORLD AROUND US". PARSONS IS UNDER CONTRACT TO MIKE RHODES OF BRISTOL PRODUCTION. DOCUMENTARY SCHEDULED FOR SHOWING IN NOVEMBER-DECEMBER PERIOD. PARSONS ASSUMES BBC WOULD BE WILLING LOAN US COPY. APPRECIATE EMBASSY LONDON EXPLORING THIS POSSIBILITY.

3. FOR PEACE CORPS: PEACE CORPS WASHINGTON MAY BE INTERESTED IN FOLLOW UP IF SEQUENCE ON PC PROJECT IN MADAROUNFA REMAINS IN DOCUMENTARY.
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